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E.O. 12065 GDS 9/21/85 (FRIEDMAN, TOWNSEND B.) OR-P
TAGS SHUM, AR OAS
SUBJECT (C) THE IAHRC VISIT: NOT MUCH CHANGED?

1. (C) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: THE MEMBERS OF THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (IAHRC) CAME, SAW AND LISTENED DURIN THEIR SEPTEMBER 5-20 VISIT TO ARGENTINA. IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO SAY WHAT IF ANYTHING THEY CONQUERED, SINCE THOUGH THEIR VISIT MAY HAVE MADE HUMAN RIGHTS AN ISSUE FOR MANY HITHERTO UNCONCERNED OR UNCARING ARGENTINES, IT IS LESS CERTAIN IT CHANGED VERY MANY MINDS OR CONTRIBUTTED TO A CESSATION OF THE PRACTICES THAT HAVE EARNED ARGENTINA A REPUTATION AS A MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATOR AND HAVE STRAINED US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.
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2. (U) A PROGRAMMATIC SUCCESS -----

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JUDGED FROM A DISTANCE-AND WE ABOIDED DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COMMISSION-THE VISIT WAS A SUCCESS IN TERMS OF WHAT THE COMMISSION WANTED TO DO. THEY MET WITH PRESIDENT VIDELA AT THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THEIR VISIT. INTTHE LATTER ENCOUNTER THEY REPORTEDLY LEFT HIM WITH A CONFIDENTIAL AND PRELIMINARY LIST OF "RECOMMENDATIONS" PRESUMABLY ON WHAT ARGENTINA MIGHT DO TO IMPROVE ITS HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION. IN ADDITION THEY HELD CONFABS WITH ALL THE LEADING LIGHTS OF THE GOVERNEMTN, WITH PROMINENT PRISONERS LIKE TIMERNMAND AND MRS PERON, WIHT OTHER EX-PRESIDENTS, WITH HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS, WITH POLITICANS, JUDGES, GENERALS AND THE LIKE. THEY ALSO TOOK TESTIMONY FROM THE FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE DISAPPEARED AND FROM FORMER PRISONERS; CHECKED OUT AT LEAST THREE SITES OF FORMER CLANDESTINE PRISONS; AND INVESTIAGED DISAPPEARANCES.

3. (C) THROUGHOUT THEIR VISIT THE COMMISSION SEEMED TO DISPLAY BOTH PROFESSIONALISM AND, ON OCCASION, CREATIVITY. FOR EXAMPLE, EMBMERS VISITED CEMETERIES, COMPARING THE UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBERS OF ANONYMOUS BURIALS IN POTTERS FIELDS WITH THE DATES OF KNOWN CLASHES BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND TERRIRSTS-THE ASSUMPTION BEING THAT IF THERE WERE NO CORRELATION BETWEEN DATES OF THE BURIALS AND THE CLASHES, THE THE UNKNOWN DEAD MAY WELL BE DISAPPEARED WHO WERE KILLED BY THE AUTHORITIES.

4. (C) A MEDIA BARRAGE ----- THE COMMISSION'S VISIT WAS MASSIVELY COVERED BY THE ARGENTINE PRESS, TELEVISION AND RADIO. THERE CAN HARDLY BE AN ARGENTINE ALIVE WHO IS NOW UNAWARE THAT HUMAN

RIGHTS ARE AN ISSUE OF SIGNIFICANCE. EVERYWHERE THE COMMISSION WENT AND EVERYBODY THEY MET WITH-EXCEPT FOR CASES WHERE THE COMMISSION SOUGHT AND OBTAINED MORE CONFIDENTIAL MEETINGS-WAS REPORTED. THE DRAMATIC ASSEMBLY OF HUNDRES OF PEOPLE WAITING OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATIONS BUENOS AIRES OFFICE TO REPORT DISAPPEARANCES DROVE HOME THE POINT HERE THAT MANY HAVE COMPLAINTS.

5. (C) THERE WAS LITTLE DISCUSSION OF THE SUBSTANCE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE-WHAT VIOLATIONS HAVE ACTUALLY

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TAKEN PLACE AND HOW MANY. NO PAPER EVEN PUBLISHED AN INTERIVEW WITH THOSE WAITING TO GIVE TESTIMONY ABOUT VIOLATIONS TO THE COMMISSION.

6. (C) BUT THERE WERE MANY NATIONALISTIC PUBLIC PROTESTS ABOUT THE VIOLATIONS OF ARGENTINA'S SOVEREIGNTY, ABOUT THE ALLEGED FAILURE OF THE COMMISSION TO DEAL WITH TERRORIST PAST, AND, ABOUT EH NECESSITY FOR STERN MEASURE TO COUNTER A MAJOR SUBVERSIVE THREAT. GOVERNMENT ELEMTNS CLEARLY HELPED STIMULATE THIS OUTBURST OF NATIONALIST SENTIMENT. IT WAS ALSO SPONTANEOUS AND RELFECTED THE CHAUVINISTIC MOOD THAT RUNS STRONGLY HERE. THUS, THOUG HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVITS HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY ARE PLEASED THAT THE VIST BROUGHT SO MUCH ATTENTION TO THE ISSUE, WE ARE FORCED TO CONCLUDE THAT IT ALSO STIRRED SENTIMENTS THAT MAY NOT BE HELPFUL TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSE.

7. (C) THERE WAS ONE DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE REAMS OF PUBLIC RESPONSES TO THE VISIT, SOME MORE ELOQUENT AND OTHER LESS SO, BUT MOST PREDICTABLE. PUBLISHERS OF ARGENTINAS MAJOR DAILIES REFUSED THE INVITATION TO MEET WITH THE COMMISSION. SEVERAL PUBLISHERS ALSO RELEASED RINGING-AND LESS-THAN-CANDID-STATEMENTS CLAIMING THE COMPLETE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN ARGENTINA.
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AND ONE PUBLISHER VIGOROUSLY DENOUNCED IAHRC'S MEDLOLING IN ARGENTINE AFFAIRS. AS MEN WHO EARN THEIR BREAD SELLING A COMMODITY TO THE PUBLIC, THE PUBLISHERS' REACTION TO THE VISIT MAY HAVE BEEN A COMMENT ON THEIR READING OF THE PUBLIC MOOD.

8. (C) THE PERONISTS POLITICIZE THE ISSUE-TEMPORARILY AT LEAST -----
THE BIGGEST SURPRISE OF ALL WAS DELIVERED BY A GROUP OF PERONISTS. USING THE COMMISION'S VISIT AS AN OPPORTUNITY, THEY ISSUED THE FIRST STRONG PUBLIC STATEMENT OF OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT SINCE 1976.

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9. (C) THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DEVELOPMENT ARE STILL UNCERTAIN. WHETHER THE DECLARATION WAS PURELY A TACTIC--THE PERONISTS HAVE CURIOUS IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO BARGAIN WITH THE MILITARY--OR A WELL THOUGHT OUT MOVE BY MEN
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WHO BELIEVE THE TIME IS RIPE TO BEGIN AN OPPOSITION CAMPAIGN IS UNCLEAR. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CHOSEN TO

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INTERPRET IT AS A POLITICAL MOVE BY "COMMUNIST-INSPIRED" ELEMENTS IN THE PERONIST MOVEMENT ANY MANY OTHER PERONIST LEADERS QUICKLY DISOWNED THE STATEMENT AND DISTANCED THEMSELVES FROM BITTLE.

10. (C) IF THE PERONIST'S GRAB FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS BANNER HAD ENDURED IT WOULD HAVE POLITICIZED THE ISSUE ALONG THE LINES OF THE GREAT SCHISM IN ARGENTINE SOVIETY-THE PERONISTS AND THE ANTI-PERONISTS. THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARGENTINA HAS ON BALANCE BENEFITTED BECAUSE IT WAS, AT LEAST SUPERFICIALLY NON POLITICAL. THE DEGREE THAT IT BECOMES POLITICIZED COULD INFLUENCE--AND RESTRICT--THE ABILITY OF THIRD PARTIES LIKE THE UNITED STATES TO INTERJECT THEMSELVES INTO THE ISSUE.

11. (C) THE REAL POLITICS: UNIFORMED POLITICS ----- THE MOST IMPORTANT IMMEDIATE POLITICAL BATTLE IN THE COUNTRY CONCERNS THE MILITARY SUCCESSION PROBLEM AND NOT THE PERONISTS. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE IAHRC VISIT WILL NOT BECOME AN ISSUE IN THE STRUGGLE THAT PITS RELATIVE MODERATES--PRESIDENT VIDELA, ARMY COMMANDER VIOLA--AGAINST THE KNOWN HARDLINERS--ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF CARLOS SUAREZ MASON AND GENERAL LUCIANO MENENDEZ. WE HAVE NO DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF HOW THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MILITARY HAVE RESPONDED TO THE VISIT. FOR EXAMPLE, DOES VIDELA THINK IT WAS A SUCCESSFUL GAMBLE, THUS FAR?

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13. (C) BRIGHTENING ARGENTINA'S IMAGE -----
ONE OF THE GOA'S GOALS IN INVITING THE COMMISSION
WAS TO BRIGHTEN ARGENTINA'S BENT AND TARNISHED IMAGE
ABROAD. THE FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION WILL DETERMINE
IN GREAT MEASURE HOW SUCCESSFUL THAT BID WILL BE. BUT
AT LEAST AS SIGNIFICANT WILL BE THE BEHAVIOR OF THE
NATION'S SECURITY FORCES, WHOSE BRUTAL PRACTICES EARNED
THE COUNTRY THE LABEL OF A MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATOR.
AND THESE SAME SECURITY FORCES BY DESIGN OR IN-
ADVERTENCE CONTINUED THOSE PRACTICES PRIOR TO AND DUR-
ING THE COMMISSION'S VISIT. THE GROSSEST PUBLIC
MANIFESTATION OF THIS PROBLEM WAS THE TAKING OF THREE
SMALL CHILDREN DURING THE LAST DAYS OF THE COMMISSION'S
STAY. AND THE SECURITY
FORCES INDULGED IN ACTIONS RANGING FROM THE HARSH
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--CONTINUING DISAPPEARANCES--TO THE KEYSTONE COPPISH--
CLUMSY AND UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO INTIMIDATE THOSE
APPROACHING THE COMMISSION, AND SETTING OF "BLACK"
PAMPHLET BOMBS WHICH SOUGHT TO IDENTIFY THE HUMAN RIGHTS
ACTIVISTS WITH THE TERRORISTS.
IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT PRESIDENT VIDELA AND GENERAL
VIOLA WANTED SUCH ACTIONS TO TAKE PLACE, EITHER AS PRELUDES OR
ACCOMPANIMENT TO THE IAHRC VISIT. BUT THEY DID, EMPHASIZING
THAT THE SECURITY FORCES ARE SEIZED WITH A DIFFERENT
MENTAL FRAMEWORK. THE RULE OF LAW CONTINUES
TO BE BREACHED WHENEVER THE MILITARY OR ELEMENTS WITHIN
THE SECURITY FORCES DEEM IT JUSTIFIED--NO MATTER WHAT
THE IMPLICATIONS FOR US-ARGENTINE RELATIONS.
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